

AMERICAN VIEW
OF THE
DECLINE
OF THE
SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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AN AMERICAN VIEW

OF THE

CAUSES WHICH HAVE LED TO THE

DECLINE

OF THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

IN

GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND.

[By Saml. M. Janney].

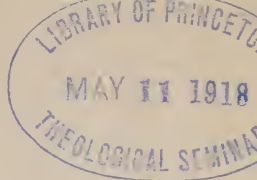
"Truth never lost ground by inquiry, because she is most of all reasonable."—

PEN'S *Maxims*.

LONDON:

A. W. BENNETT, 5, BISHOPSGATE WITHOUT.
PHILADELPHIA: T. ELLWOOD ZELL.

1860.



ADVERTISEMENT TO THE ENGLISH EDITION.

THE original advertisement for the Prize Essays on the diminution in number and influence of the Society of Friends, by limiting the inquiry to the United Kingdom, did not raise the true issue, and necessarily gave an inadequate and partial direction to the treatment of the subject; the effects of which are obvious in all the Essays that have yet been published, and not the least so in the two successful ones, in proportion to their length. Although it is an unquestionable fact, that the Society of Friends has diminished in numbers in this country, it is not so in the cognate States of the North American Continent. There must, therefore, be some causes at work in this country, which do not affect Friends in that. Including the various sections into which the Society is now divided, all claiming the name of Friends, there are, it is believed, a larger number of persons professing our principles than at any former period. In some parts of the United States the Society of Friends, as an outward Church, is prosperous and largely increasing. It may be that the present Essay does not solve the whole question; but, as a contribution from quite another point of view than those on the spot may, perhaps, be able to take, it must be interesting, and may present a useful watch-word, if rightly received.

CAUSES OF THE DECLINE

OF THE

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

It may be considered an established fact, that the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland has diminished in numbers, and there is some reason to fear that its influence in promoting the spiritual progress of mankind is less now than it was at a former period. Hence it has become a subject of solicitude, among those who are interested in the welfare of this religious body, to investigate the causes that have led to its declension, in order that a remedy may be sought, which, under the Divine blessing, will arrest the progress of decay.

Nor is the interest felt in this subject confined to those who are in membership with Friends. There are, doubtless, many others, who believe "that the Society at one time bore a powerful witness to the world concerning some of the errors to which it is most prone, and some of the truths which are most necessary to it; and that this witness is becoming more and more feeble."* The pure doctrines and noble testimonies maintained

* Advertisement for Prize Essays.

by the early Friends with unwavering constancy, through a long season of severe persecution, have been a blessing to mankind. They bore witness to the spirituality of the Christian dispensation, the efficiency of a free Gospel ministry, and the incompatibility of war, capital punishment, oaths, and slavery, with the benign precepts of the Redeemer.

An Episcopalian author, while treating of the alleged decline of the Society of Friends, alludes to it as "a communion in which there was at one time a development of vital piety only commensurate with its limits, and an exhibition of beneficence only limited by its means."* "The most usual objection to Quakerism," says an English reviewer, "is, that it is by far too refined and spiritual a system for this world. But its votaries have proved, through the vicissitudes of two centuries, that it is eminently calculated to make men happier, wiser, and better. The great principles which the early apostles of the sect were the first to introduce successfully, have been adopted by thousands, who were not aware to what source they were indebted for them. These principles have gained ground rapidly, and must continue to widen their dominion over the hearts of men as society advances towards the Christian standard, for they lie at the very foundation of all true moral, intellectual, and political reforms."

As one of the points of this inquiry relates to the diminution of numbers, it is to be regretted that there are no published statistics, from which precise information can be obtained. It has seldom been the practice of the Society, either in England or America, to collect such information, although each monthly meeting is required to keep a regular record of births and deaths, and to preserve the minutes of its proceedings, which embrace an account of all members received or disowned. It appears, that of the great numbers who, in the days of George Fox, were convinced of his views, many did not become members of the Society, but merely assented to its

* "Episcopal Recorder," Philadelphia, 1854.

doctrines.* From an estimate published in the London "Friend," in 1852, we learn, that in 1680, being ten years prior to the death of Fox, the Society of Friends, in Great Britain and Ireland, numbered about 40,000 members. During the subsequent fifteen years, it is supposed that 10,000 emigrated to America, and, during the greater part of the last century, the emigration continued to be considerable; but it was probably not more than sufficient to keep down the natural increase. The Society in America has continued to increase; and if we embrace in our estimate the three separate organizations bearing the name of Friends, it probably numbers 150,000, while the whole number in Great Britain and Ireland but little exceeds 18,000.

It is scarcely necessary in this investigation to take any account of the loss of members by the several schisms or separations that took place in the 17th century. The first, occasioned by John Perrot, occurred about the year 1661; the second was produced by John Wilkinson and John Story, in 1683; and the third by George Keith, in 1692. The first two of these schisms were small, and produced but little effect; the last was more considerable, but was chiefly confined to Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

About the middle of the last century, the state of the Society of Friends in Great Britain and Ireland was very discouraging,—there being much lukewarmness, and, in many places, a lamentable departure from the principles of their profession.†

In 1760, a Committee of the Yearly Meeting visited all the subordinate meetings, and, through the Divine blessing on their labours, some improvement was witnessed, which, for a time, arrested the progress of decay. As we approach the close of the last century, the symptoms of decline become more apparent, and during the present century, the causes which led to it have been more fully developed.

* Tuke's Memoir of G. Fox. Preface.

† See John Griffiths's Journal.

These causes may be classed under the following heads; viz. :—

1st. An increase of wealth, and an undue influence accorded to those who possessed it.

2nd. An approximation to the doctrines of the Established Church.

3rd. The loss of members by disownment on account of marriage.

Under the first of these heads, viz., The increase of wealth, let us advert to the condition of the Society at its first rise.

So large, at that time, was the proportion of its members in the rural districts, that some of its adversaries said “the Quakers would not come into any great towns, but lived in the fells like butterflies.”* Afterwards, very large numbers were convinced of Friends’ principles in London, Bristol, and other cities; and there is reason to believe that the exactions of the tithe system induced many to relinquish agriculture for a residence in towns, where they engaged in commerce or manufactures.

Their probity, industry, punctuality, and economy, enabled many of them to amass wealth; and luxury, which is the bane of religious society, ultimately followed in its train. Even those among the rich who adhered to their principles became more and more connected with the gentry; they sometimes associated with people of rank, and their liberal contributions to benevolent objects gained them public applause. Some of these distinguished Friends were more remarkable for wealth and intelligence than for depth of religious experience; but their position gave them weight, and in meetings for discipline, where they took an active part, their influence was injuriously exerted.

This result was still further promoted by the large numbers of indigent members who received assistance from the meetings; for it is a well-known fact, that the Society supports its

* Journal of George Fox, p. 281. London Edition, 1694.

own poor in the most liberal manner. These indigent members, although entitled to participate in all the deliberations of the body, and to have an influence proportioned to their religious attainments, were, nevertheless, backward in expressing their views, and the decisions of the meetings were gathered from the sentiments expressed by the more active and influential members.

In order to show that such was the state of the Society in London and other places, I will first adduce the evidence of George Dillwyn, an eminent minister of the Gospel, belonging to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, who was in England between the years 1784 and 1791.* In a letter dated London, 2nd Month 8th, 1785, addressed to James Thornton, he thus describes the state of the Society in that city:—"My prospects of service are much confined to this great city and its neighbourhood; and here, if I have a right apprehension, things are but low in our Society; and the restoration of true gospel order discouragingly difficult, owing, as I think, in a great measure, to the meetings being loaded with members in indigent circumstances. Their relief and support depending principally upon those in greatest affluence, occasions such to be looked to; and they assume more sway in the management of discipline than (generally speaking) they have right qualification for; while some of those who are low in the world, and able to contribute but little on such occasions, are, on the other hand, too backward. Thus, the guidance of a wisdom superior to human appears to be but little waited for or attended to, as the rule of action, which occasions such meetings rather to resemble courts of civil justice than of religious society."

In confirmation of these views, I refer to an epistle of Esther Tuke, wife of William Tuke, of York, which was approved by York Quarterly Meeting, and ordered to be printed,

* For the character of George Dillwyn, see Bowden's "History of Friends in America." Vol. ii., p. 409.

by a minute dated 12th Month, 1792. The following is an extract from it, viz.:—"Great inconsistency of practice with our holy profession is lamentably discoverable, many having gone into the spirit of the world in an inordinate pursuit after riches, and a multiplicity of business, far beyond Divine limitations, which have become snares to themselves and as wings to their children, whereby they have departed from under the government and simplicity of truth, into the friendships, customs, and manners of a deluded world. Many, who from their stations should be as leaders and waymarks, are so much tinctured with the spirit of the world, its empty conversation and concerns, as to verify the declaration respecting Israel, 'Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water,' whereby a want of heavenly wisdom, and an increase of the earthly, are manifest in many of our religious movements, especially in transacting the business of the Church; and thus true judgment is turned back, and equity cannot enter."

The state of the Society in Ireland may be gathered from the following passages from the "Life of James Gough," a minister in good standing:—"In process of time these worthy men and women, in whose hearts the love of God and His people had by long growth become deeply rooted, one after another finished their course honourably, leaving an excellent savour behind them; but when they were removed, very few of the youth, or others, succeeded them in the right line to fill up their vacant places with propriety. Of their survivors, on one hand, a considerable number retained the ancient plainness of language and habit; and, rigidly censorious of any deviation therefrom, valued themselves thereupon as if it were the only test and badge of discipleship, while their hearts were gone after their covetousness in eagerly pursuing, and sordidly hoarding, temporal wealth. On the other hand, a large body of youth and others shooting up in self-indulgence, in conformity to the world, and rushing headlong into the temptations of the times. Yet, amidst this inundation of negligence and revolt, there remain, in most places, a number of sincere-

hearted Friends, and a few worthy ministers and elders; but within these twenty years past, there has been a great alteration for the worse.”*

2. The second point which I propose to consider is, the approximation to the doctrines of the Established Church, on the part of influential ministers and writers among Friends in England.

It is well known that at the rise of the Society, and for a long time afterwards, the Friends were violently assailed from the pulpit and the press, not only by the clergy of the Established Church, but by Dissenting ministers, and that they were charged with denying some of the fundamental doctrines held by the orthodox Churches. William Penn, George Whitehead, and other Friends, were engaged in several public disputes with Dissenting ministers, among whom were Vincent, Ives, Hicks, and Baxter. The press teemed with controversial works, and the Friends were not less active than others in defending themselves, and assailing the doctrines of their adversaries. We know that among the points at issue in these controversies were the doctrines of the Trinity, original sin, and imputative righteousness, which the Friends denied, and the doctrine of the universal and saving light of Christ, which they maintained.

They were, doubtless, calumniated by their adversaries, and charged with false doctrines which they did not hold; but there can be no question that on the points above stated they differed from most other Dissenters, as well as from the Anglican Church, and the Roman Catholics. If they did not dissent from the commonly received doctrines on these points, they pursued a most extraordinary and unaccountable course, in suffering persecution and obloquy, which might have been averted, by explicitly avowing their belief in the dogmas commonly held by other Protestants. Did they desire persecution for its own sake? Or did they not rather submit to it,

* James Gough's Journal.

because they could not subscribe to the popular theology, and would not flinch from an open avowal of their faith?

The evidence to be adduced from the writings of the early Friends to prove this position, I shall reserve for a subsequent part of this Essay, in order to contrast them with the doctrines lately promulgated by some Friends in Great Britain. In the meantime, let us glance at some of the causes which may have led to a departure from the ancient doctrines of Friends.

In the latter part of the last century, the scepticism and infidelity which prevailed so extensively on the Continent of Europe, and especially in France, made some advances, also, in Great Britain and Ireland. The natural consequence was to alarm and arouse the professors of religion of all classes, some of whom, dreading the progress of infidel principles, went to the opposite extreme, becoming more rigidly orthodox.

During a time of such general excitement, it could not be expected that the Friends in England would escape surrounding influences; and events that occurred about the same time in Ireland rendered them still more liable to re-actionary tendencies.

About the year 1794, a few persons in Ireland, who occupied official stations in the Society, began to manifest their disapprobation of the term "holy," as applied to the Scriptures. This led to a discussion concerning the authenticity and Divine authority of the sacred writings, the rectitude of the Jewish wars, and other kindred subjects. It was an unprofitable controversy, in which there was exhibited too much boldness and latitude of speculation on one side, and probably too little forbearance on the other. The result was, that after some years of controversy and painful dissension, a large number of both sexes withdrew, or were disowned, from the Society. Some of these had been among the most valued members, and were persons of sincere piety; but, after being severed from the body, they had not sufficient unity among themselves to maintain a separate organization.

There can be no doubt that this disastrous schism, which came to an end about the year 1803, had a considerable effect

upon the Friends in Great Britain, and induced them to watch with great vigilance against the introduction of similar innovations among themselves. But they were not equally careful to guard against a leaning towards the doctrines now called Evangelical, from which their forefathers dissented. In order to advance the good of mankind, they joined with persons of other denominations in benevolent associations, and were found to be efficient auxiliaries. In promoting the abolition of slavery, the improvement of prisons, and the relief of the famishing poor, their exertions and their liberality were beyond all praise. In these enterprises they were, in fact, rather leaders than auxiliaries, and probably no compromise of their principles ensued. But when they joined other Societies, which are rather of a religious than a benevolent character, they came more immediately into contact with the clergy and with persons of high rank or position; and there is reason to believe that a change in their religious sentiments took place. Some of those testimonies against titles of honour, and formality in religion, for which their forefathers suffered, came to be considered as mere peculiarities, and they began to regard with less distrust a priesthood which derives its support from the onerous system of tithes. There being a tendency in most minds to assimilate in sentiment with their associates, we may reasonably conclude that the Friends who were brought, by their position or education, within the fascinating circle of rank, and wealth, and high intelligence, could scarcely maintain in their full integrity those radical doctrines, and humbling testimonies, which rendered the early Quakers obnoxious to persecution and reproach.

The change which ensued was gradual, and it would be difficult to trace its progress, because the sentiments promulgated by the ministers in their public discourses, and by those who wrote on religious subjects, were generally expressed in scriptural language, and might be construed in accordance with the ancient doctrines. It was observable, however, that less stress was placed, by many, upon the "universal and saving

light of Christ," and more reference made to His outward work and sufferings on the cross. When the late Joseph John Gurney began to publish his religious works, about the year 1824, the progress of innovation became more apparent. His elaborate and learned writings, extensive charities, and high social position, gave him great influence in the Society, and enabled him openly to avow and maintain doctrines that were at variance with those of the early Friends, though he seems not to have been conscious of it. His religious opinions were probably modified by his position and education. Born to the possession of great wealth, educated at Oxford, established in a rich banking-house, and having for his familiar friends rectors and bishops, members of Parliament, and peers of the realm, it is not surprising that some of his religious views should take their hue from the brilliant circle by which he was surrounded. During a quarter of a century, he was accustomed annually to entertain, for three successive days, at his seat of Earlham, a very large company of the clergy and gentry, who came from a distance to attend the anniversary meetings of the Norwich Bible Society, of which he was secretary.* These social parties, which numbered from sixty to ninety, were, doubtless, very delightful; the conversation of the intelligent guests being led by their benevolent host to dwell upon subjects of deep interest in religion, literature, or science. It is not my purpose, in these remarks, to censure him for his munificent hospitality, but to point out the associations by which his sentiments were moulded. The following passage from his journal was written soon after the anniversary meeting of the Bible Society in 1826:† —

"My soul has been deeply revolving how far my peculiar principles can stand the double test to which they are now subjected, that of the solitude, poverty, nakedness, and apparent decline, to which we poor and misunderstood Quakers are exposed; and on the other hand, that of the flowing association, the high tone of religious feeling, and the evangelical

* *Memoirs*, Norwich and London, 1854, vol. i., p. 72. † *Ibid.* p. 314.

prosperity of the many pious persons, not Friends, by whom I am surrounded, and with whom I have been lately permitted very sweetly to unite in essentials, and in the social though not public worship of Almighty God. Can I, under such circumstances, and especially under that probable deepening and heightening of the picture to which I may look forward, live and die a Quaker? The question is to me one of awful and solemn interest, and I think I am favoured at this time, in the humiliation and silence of self, with a degree of quiet decisiveness to answer it in the affirmative."

Although he was enabled to return an affirmative answer to the question, whether he could "live and die a Quaker?" it can scarcely be presumed that others, with less force of character, and especially the younger members of the Society, would stand the test to which he was subjected. It appears that he was "permitted very sweetly to unite in essentials" with his guests, many of whom were clergymen of the Established Church; from which we may conclude that the views of our early Friends, in relation to the call, qualification, and maintenance of ministers, were not, with him, essential points of doctrine. In the year 1825, he published an elaborate work, under the title of "Essays on Christianity," which was highly approved by those who rank as "evangelical" in the Church of England. The Bishop of Norwich assured him, by letter, of the high opinion which he entertained respecting it; he also received letters of commendation from Robert Southey, Hannah More, and Charles Simeon, of King's College, Cambridge. T. Fowell Buxton informed him that the Duke of Gloucester had "read it over and over again;" and his friend, Edward Edwards, wrote concerning it, "What an extraordinary production it is for a young layman, for a banker—above all, for a Friend."* It was, indeed, an extraordinary production for a *Friend*, as I shall proceed to show; but was it approved by the Society of Friends in England? Letters addressed to him by Friends in high standing have been published, showing

* Memoirs, i. 292—294.

that it met their unqualified approval. William Forster, a minister in full unity with the Society, wrote as follows, namely,—“It would be strange if I did not feel more than a common and passing interest in the work—for I think I never found myself, upon any occasion, so much anticipated; it gives utterance to my own views and feelings in such lucid and convincing language, and withal it solves some of my difficulties so thoroughly and satisfactorily.” Jonathan Hutchinson, another minister in good esteem, and Lindley Murray, an influential Friend, wrote concerning it in terms of strong commendation.*

The publication of this work does not seem to have impaired the religious standing of the author, for he afterwards travelled much as a minister, with credentials from the requisite Meetings, and he still continued to have great influence in the Yearly Meeting. It must not, however, be understood that Friends in England were unanimous in approving his works; there were many who dissented from them, and in order to reconcile this class, some omissions and modifications were made in later editions, but the essential characteristics of his writings still remain, and they are undoubtedly instrumental in leading the younger members of the Society from the vital principles of Quakerism to an assimilation with the Established Church.

I will now proceed to contrast the doctrines of Joseph John Gurney with those of the early Friends.

On entering upon this branch of the inquiry, I may observe, that George Fox and his coadjutors professed not to teach any new doctrines, but to revive primitive Christianity. Now Christianity, at the time of its first promulgation, was eminently spiritual; it was the manifestation of Divine life and power operating upon the souls of men. “For the life was manifested,” says the apostle John, “and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us.”† He that had been manifested in the flesh was now come in the Spirit,

* Memoirs of J. J. Gurney, vol. i. pp. 296—298. † 1 John i. 2.

for He lived in the hearts of His disciples, purified them from all pollution, filled them with heavenly joy, and armed them with spiritual weapons to make war in righteousness against all evil. But this pure spiritual religion was, in the course of a few centuries, sadly eclipsed by the corruption of its doctrines through the prevalence of Greek philosophy, and hence resulted that dark system of scholastic theology, which for a thousand years obscured the light of heavenly truth. The Protestant Reformation shook the ecclesiastical system of Rome, and opened the way for greater freedom of thought and expression. It was a great and blessed work; but it was only a beginning of true reformation, for the Church being left in connexion with the State, was subjected to the corrupting influences of wealth and power. There was, however, a still greater evil left almost untouched by the Protestant reformers; and that was, the prevalent system of speculative Theology. It is true that some of its branches were cut away, but the body remained, and its roots were firmly fixed in the self-sufficiency of human wisdom.

Christianity was still considered a science to be learned in schools of theology, creeds and confessions of faith were still constructed by erudite professors, and mere dogma being substituted for the life of God in the soul, there could be no spiritual progress. It was to remedy this great defect, and to revive primitive Christianity, that a people were raised up by Divine Providence, having for their fundamental principle the "universal and saving light of Christ."

George Fox says in his Journal, "I was sent to turn people from darkness to the light, that they might receive Christ Jesus; for to as many as should receive Him in His light, I saw that He would give power to become the sons of God, which I had obtained by receiving Christ. And I was to direct people to the Spirit that gave forth the Scriptures, by which they might be led into all truth, and so up to Christ and God, as they had been who gave them forth. And I was to turn them to the grace of God, and to the truth in the

heart which came by Jesus; that by this grace they might be taught, which would bring them salvation, that their hearts might be established by it, and their words might be seasoned, and all might come to know their salvation nigh. For I saw that Christ had died for all men, and was a propitiation for all; and had enlightened all men and women with His Divine and saving light; and that none could be a true believer but who believed in it. I saw that the grace of God, which brings salvation, had appeared to all men, and that the manifestation of the Spirit of God was given to every man to profit withal.”*

William Penn, in his “Christian Quaker,” writes concerning “the light of Christ within, the great principle of God in man, the root and spring of Divine life and knowledge in the soul, that by which salvation is effected for man, and which is the characteristic of the people called Quakers, their faith and testimony to the world.”† In his history of the “Rise and Progress of the People called Quakers,” he says, “I have already touched upon their fundamental principle, which is the corner-stone of their fabric, and, indeed, to speak eminently and properly, their characteristic, or main distinguishing point, or principle; viz., the light of Christ within, as God’s gift for man’s salvation; this, I say, is the root of the goodly tree of doctrines that grew and branched out from it, &c.,” “which I shall now mention in their natural and experimental order.”‡

Robert Barclay, in his treatise on “Universal Love,” holds the following language concerning “the first or chief principle” held by the Society of Friends. “There is somewhat of God, some light, some grace, some power, some measure of the Spirit, some divine, spiritual, heavenly, substantial life and virtue, in all men, which is a faithful witness against all unrighteousness, and ungodliness in the heart of man, and leads, draws, moves, and inclines the mind of man to righteousness, and seeks to

* G. Fox’s Journal, London Ed., 1694.

† Select Works, p. 233.

‡ Ibid. p. 764.

leaven him, as he gives way thereto, into the nature of itself; whereby an inward thorough and real redemption might be wrought in the hearts of all men of whatsoever nation, country, or kingdom they be, notwithstanding whatsoever outward knowledge or benefit they be, by the providence of God, necessarily deprived of. Because whatsoever they want of that, yet such a measure of this light, seed, life, and word, is communicated to all, as is sufficient truly to convert them from the evil of their ways, purify and cleanse them, and consequently bring them to salvation." "Yea, they believe this light, grace, and seed, to be no other but a measure of that life and spirit that was in Christ Jesus; which, being in Him who is the Head, in the fulness of it, is from Him (in whom it resideth), as He is ascended up into and glorified in the heavens, *extendeth to all men in order to redeem them from sin*, and convert them to God."*

It is obvious from these passages that Fox, Penn, and Barclay attributed redemption and salvation to an inward work effected in the soul through the operation of that Divine power which the Scriptures designate by various names, as the Light, the Life, the Spirit of Christ, the seed of the kingdom, the grace of God, the anointing, and the Comforter. It must be understood, however, that they fully believed the Scripture testimony concerning the Divinity of Christ, and His Sonship, His dying for the sins of the whole world, His acceptable offering or sacrifice, His being our propitiation and mediator with the Father; but some of these doctrines they accepted in a more spiritual sense than the construction placed upon them in the popular theology.

As it is not deemed expedient to encumber this Essay with a mass of extracts that might prove tedious to most readers, I must refer for part of my evidence to "An Appeal for the Ancient Doctrines of Friends," issued in 1847, by the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends, called Orthodox. In that document it is shown, by extracts from the writings

* Barclay's Works, London Ed. 1692.

of Joseph John Gurney, that he speaks of the Holy Scriptures "in a manner different from that in which the Society of Friends has always thought to be safe and consistent with the Scriptures themselves."* It is further observed, "If the Holy Scriptures are thus to be designated as the principal means" of our "illumination and conversion," and as revealing a moral law, "applying to all circumstances, comprehending all conditions, regulating all motives, directing and controlling all overt acts," we must then acknowledge them to be "the primary rule of faith and manners. Yet many persons have been converted from the evil of their ways by other instrumental means than the Bible; and neither the precious truths of Holy Writ, nor any other means, unless immediately applied by the Saviour in the work of regeneration, can convert any man unto holiness. While it is our duty to maintain the authority of the Holy Scriptures, it is necessary to avoid assigning to them a place which He who inspired holy men to write them, never intended they should occupy, and which they do not themselves claim. Being given forth by the Holy Spirit, they are necessarily subordinate thereto, and are only availing for our instruction in righteousness, as the mind is enlightened and opened by the same Holy Spirit to understand and profit by them."†

The doctrine of the Trinity, or tri-personality of the Deity, was denied by the early Friends. They acknowledged the scriptural doctrine of Father, Word, and Spirit; but they rejected the term "person" as applied to them, and they insisted that "these three are one." Not three *persons*, but one indivisible and omnipresent Spirit, who created the world, who enlightened the minds of the holy men of old, who "was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," and "who is not far from every one of us, for in Him we live, and move, and have our being." George Fox, in many passages, controverts the doctrine of three persons in the Godhead. In reply to Christopher Wade, he says: "Thou knowest not Him that is

* See the Appeal, p. 10 to 22.

† Appeal, p. 11.

in the Father, and the Father in Him, glorified with the Father before the world began. And the Scripture doth not tell people of a Trinity, nor three persons, but the Common Prayer mass-book speaks of three persons brought in by thy father the Pope; and the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, was always one.”* Joseph John Gurney, on the contrary, held the common Trinitarian doctrine, although he did not use the word Trinity. He speaks of the “personality of the Holy Spirit,” and thinks the apostles “regarded the Holy Spirit as one possessing a personal authority, exercising personal powers, and requiring a personal allegiance.” In treating of the Supreme Being, he writes of “the personality and unity in Him of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.”†

The doctrine of Original Sin was not held by the early Friends. They maintained, that when our first parents fell by transgression, they lost the Divine image, and became “carnally minded which is death;” but no guilt accrued to their descendants, neither is righteousness *inherent* in man, in the unregenerate state. “The soul of the child,” says Phipps, “never was in the parent, and therefore could never sin in him, nor derive guilt from his transgression. Neither can guilt accrue to it merely from its being joined to a body descended from him, because that junction is the act of the Creator.”‡ “This evil and corrupt seed,” says Barclay, “is not imputed to infants until they actually join with it.”§

Joseph John Gurney, alluding to the fall of Adam, says, it “was the immediate cause of a moral degeneracy, and therefore of a *punishable guilt* in the whole human family of his descendants.” Again, he says “the whole race of their descendants have inherited a nature infected with sin and

* G. Fox’s Great Mystery, p. 246.

† See “Appeal for the Ancient Doctrines of Friends,” pp. 41—43; also, Essays, pp. 146—159; London Edition.

‡ Original and Present State of Man, pp. 10—13.

§ Apology, Prop. 4.

prone to evil.”* This sentiment is often repeated in various forms in his writings.

The doctrine of imputative righteousness was rejected by the early Friends. George Fox, being asked “whether a believer be justified by Christ’s righteousness imputed, yea or no?” replied, “He that believeth is born of God, and he that is born of God is justified by Christ alone, *without imputation*.”† William Penn refuted, from Scripture, the doctrine of “the justification of impure persons by an imputative righteousness,” and proved that its consequences were “irrational and irreligious.” And Robert Barclay, in his “Apology, Proposition 7, Sect. vi.,” denies the position, “that as our sin is imputed to Christ, who had no sin, so Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us without our being righteous,” and shows that this argument might be stretched to that length as to become “very pleasing to wicked men that love to abide in their sins.”

Joseph John Gurney says, “Our sinfulness may properly be said to be *imputed* to Christ, because, when He underwent the penalty which that sinfulness demanded, He was dealt with as if He had been Himself the sinner; and it is, I apprehend, on a perfectly analogous principle, that His righteousness is said to be *imputed* to us, because, through the boundless mercy of God, we are permitted to reap the fruits of it. We are regarded as if, like Him, we were absolutely guiltless, and are therefore delivered from everlasting punishment.”‡ The doctrine of imputed righteousness is found in many other places in his writings.

In relation to the body and blood of Christ, there is a wide difference between the views of J. J. Gurney and those of the early Friends. Their doctrine is thus expressed by Barclay:—“The body, then, of Christ, which believers partake of, is spiritual and not carnal; and His blood which they drink

* Essays on Christianity, London, 1825, pp. 209, 548.

† Saul’s Errand to Damascus. London, 1654.

‡ Essays on Christianity, p. 437. Appeal for Ancient Doctrines, p. 33.

of, is pure and heavenly, and not human and elementary." On the contrary, J. J. Gurney says, that "on a careful examination of the Scriptures it will be found that the flesh always means His *human body*, that body which was born, died, and rose again; and that His blood always means His *very blood*, which was His natural life, and which was actually shed for the remission of sins." "To believe in the Son of God, as He was thus made manifest, and to eat the bread of life, are evidently mentioned as one and the same thing."*

The early Friends placed sanctification before justification, and attributed both to the same cause, agreeably to the apostle's doctrine—"But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God."—1 Cor. vi. 11. George Fox declared—"So far as a man is sanctified, so far he is justified, and no further, for the same that is his sanctification is his justification, and his wisdom, and his redemption."† Richard Claridge, after quoting 1 Cor. vi. 11, said, "It was evident, by the apostle's words, that he did not lead us to an outward righteousness only for our justification, but to an inward righteousness, as being the immediate cause thereof; for if we attend to the order of the apostle's testimony, we must be washed and sanctified before we can be justified. And if we come to witness the efficacious work of the Spirit of Christ in our cleansing and sanctification, then we shall know ourselves to be in a state of justification, but not till then. For though Christ be a propitiation for the sins of the whole world, yet no man can comfortably apply Him as such to his own soul, but as he first experiences the sanctifying work of the Spirit."‡

In direct contradiction to these testimonies, J. J. Gurney writes, that "in the order of the grace of God, justification *precedes* sanctification, and that the faith in Jesus Christ, by

* Brief Remarks on Justice of Scripture; and Hodgson's Review, p. 119.

† Great Mystery, p. 284.

‡ R. C.'s Works. London, 1726, p. 78.

which the *ungodly* are justified, has respect in a very pre-eminent manner to the atonement which He has made for the sins of the whole world.”*

In the writings of the early Friends, they do not speak of Christ’s sufferings as a *substitute* for sinners, nor do they apply the term *vicarious* to His death on the cross. It was the advice of George Fox, that they should adhere to scriptural terms in treating of such subjects.

In J. J. Gurney’s treatise on the “Love of God,” as quoted in the “Appeal for Ancient Doctrines,” he says, “Let us call to mind that in that hour of unutterable desertion, the righteous vengeance of God against a guilty world was poured forth upon the innocent *substitute*.” Again, on page 40, he says, “Behold the glorious partner of His Father’s throne freely opening His bosom to the *vials of His wrath*, and bleeding on the cross in the nature of man, and bearing, in His own body on the tree, the penalty of the sins of mankind.”†

All who are acquainted with the doctrines of the early Friends must see that these views of J. J. Gurney are not consistent with them, but are more in accordance with the Articles of the Church of England.

The doctrines promulgated in his writings we have reason to believe were preached by him, and probably by some other Friends in England, who were recognised as ministers. Now, let us reflect upon the consequences that must ensue from this abandonment of first principles. As among the primitive Christians, when they ceased to rely upon the life of Christ revealed in the soul as a quickening Spirit, and engaged in theological speculations, it brought darkness and division into the Church; so among modern Friends, whenever they cease to rely upon Christ’s inward teaching as sufficient for salvation, they lapse from the spirit into the letter, from the life and power of religion into mere speculative dogmas, and the same disastrous results must ensue.

* Hodgson’s Examination, p. 56.

† These two passages, we are informed by a note in the Appeal, p. 33, were omitted in an edition of J. J. Gurney’s Treatise, printed in America.

The ministry which was instrumental in gathering the Society was remarkable for its simplicity, its freedom from popular theology, and its baptizing power. "The bent and stress of their ministry," says William Penn, "was conversion to God, regeneration, and holiness, not schemes of doctrine and verbal creeds, or new forms of worship, but a leaving off in religion the superfluous, and reducing the ceremonious and formal part, and pressing earnestly the substantial, the necessary and profitable part to the soul, as all, upon a serious reflection, must and do acknowledge."*

Their preaching did not consist of "schemes of doctrine" wrought out by intellectual effort, or deduced from Scripture texts by the aid of theological science; nor yet was it the impassioned language of mere religious excitement; but it was the overflowing of Divine love that sprang in their hearts, the expression of heavenly thoughts that arose in their minds, through the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

It may safely be affirmed that much of the preaching of the English Friends, though not all of it, has, for the last forty years, been more imbued with the theological element than it was in former times; and it has doubtless arisen from the apprehension that infidelity was abroad, and must be combated. A far more effectual method of arresting infidelity would have been to call mankind to the simple and sublime truths proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount, and to inculcate a reliance upon that "anointing" which abides in the soul, and teaches all things. A writer in the "British Friend," of 4th Month, 1854, alluding to the frequent warnings they received to beware of heresy, makes the following remarks:—"But why these admonitions to beware of Unitarianism? We need rather to be reminded of the danger of falling into Evangelicalism, for out of this our forefathers were gathered, but into this we are in danger of falling. Few leave us to join the Unitarians, whilst many go over to the Evangelicals."

The result here described as now taking place in England, is

* "Rise and Progress," Penn's Select Works, p. 769.

the same that took place, more than a century and a half ago, among the partisans of George Keith, in America ; and it is remarkable, how nearly his doctrines coincide with those of J. J. Gurney. After having been a coadjutor of Fox, Penn, and Barclay, in their religious labours, George Keith removed to Pennsylvania, where he became disaffected towards the Society of Friends, and expressed dissatisfaction with its doctrines and discipline. He asserted that the Light of Christ was not sufficient for salvation, and he maintained the doctrines of the Trinity, Original Sin, and Imputative Righteousness.*

The Keithians set up separate meetings, under the name of Christian Quakers, adopted a confession of faith, and issued a testimony against their former brethren, charging them with heresy.† After these proceedings, Keith went to England, was there received into the Established Church, ordained a priest, and sent back to America as a missionary. Many of his adherents still followed him ; but others were disgusted with his course, and became reconciled to the body of Friends. In the year 1694 there were in Pennsylvania and New Jersey fifteen Keithian meetings, but they soon dwindled away, and several hundred of their members were baptized as Episcopalians.

This passage in the history of Quakerism is remarkably pertinent to the present inquiry. It shows the effect that ensues when the first principles of the Society are renounced, or lightly esteemed. As the doctrines of the Puseyites have been the stepping-stones by which many Episcopalians have gone over to Romanism, so have the doctrines of J. J. Gurney and others been the means of conducting many Friends, both in England and America, to the Episcopal and other Trinitarian Churches.

This effect is greater in the cities than in the country, owing to the greater influence of wealth and fashion. A very large proportion of the Friends in the United States being settled in the country, the loss of numbers from this cause has not been

* Keith's Examination of Barclay's Apology, London, 1702, pp. 175—305.

† Smith's History of Friends in Pennsylvania, in Hazard's Reg., vi., p. 280.

so great as in England; but in Philadelphia it is said that some of the Low-church Episcopalian clergy boast that their congregations are mainly composed of orthodox Quakers and their descendants.

The following passage from a recent publication by a Lay-Churchman in Philadelphia is worthy of consideration:—
 “With such views of Holy Scripture, and the doctrine of salvation, through Christ, as are held by these Friends, we would inquire of them, Why draw a line of distinction between you and us?” “Why stand professedly on Quaker ground, and claim Quaker principles as peculiarly your own, when it requires the perversion of sound reason and logic to make any real difference between you and us? You train your youth in a doctrinal faith that will admit them into any Evangelical Church, and all they want is to agree upon a form of profession different from yours, to become at once Churchmen after one form or another.” *

I have not adverted to the separation that took place in America in 1827, by which the Society of Friends was divided into two parts, nearly equal in numbers, one of which is known as Orthodox, and the other called Hicksites; a name, however, which the latter do not acknowledge, as they profess to hold only the doctrines of the early Friends. This separation is the most important in its consequences of any that has ever occurred in the Society; but not having extended to Great Britain, it does not come within the range of this inquiry. A subdivision of the Orthodox Friends in America has taken place, on account of the doctrines of Joseph John Gurney, which the smaller of these two sections considers unsound; while the larger body, which alone holds a correspondence with the London Yearly Meeting, has expressed no disapprobation with his writings.

A separation has also taken place in England, which more

* “Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy,” p. 32. By a Lay-Churchman. Philadelphia, 1857.

appropriately claims our attention. In the winter of 1834, a work, entitled the "Beacon," was published by Isaac Crewdson, a minister of the Society, residing in Manchester. The ostensible object of it was to refute, by Scripture testimony, the views of Elias Hicks, and particularly that of "the Light of Christ within," or, in other words, the doctrine of immediate revelation. The author of the "Beacon" says, "The great deception appears to have originated in the assumption that we are authorised to expect to be taught the true knowledge of God, and of His salvation, our duty to Him, and to our fellow-men, *immediately by the Spirit*, independently of His revelation through the Scriptures, an assumption which is unsupported by Scripture, contradicted by fact, and one which renders its votaries a prey to many fatal delusions." * This publication was considered by many Friends a covert attack upon their fundamental principle—the Light of Christ in the soul, or immediate revelation.

A warm controversy immediately ensued; the subject was introduced into the Yearly Meeting in 1835, and a Committee was appointed to aid Lancashire Quarterly Meeting, to which the writer of the "Beacon" belonged. Isaac Crewdson was advised by the Committee to suppress the "Beacon," and to cease from preaching, which he declined to do; and he, with his adherents, finding they were likely to be disowned, withdrew from the Society, and set up a separate meeting. It was a small body, and having no important principles to distinguish it from other Protestant churches, it dwindled away, and has probably ceased to exist. The loss of members sustained by the Society in this schism was not confined to those who joined the Crewdson party; for in such cases it is generally found that many become lukewarm and disaffected. The fact could not be overlooked that the Beaconites had departed very little farther from the ancient doctrines of Friends than some ministers and elders who remained in membership. More than

* "Beacon," p. 6; London, 1835.

twenty years have elapsed since the "Beacon" controversy; and the Society of Friends in the United Kingdom still continues to decline. Have we not reason to conclude that this result is chiefly owing to an assimilation in doctrine and practice to the Established Church, and that the progress of decay must continue, unless there be a recurrence to first principles?

3. The third point of inquiry relates to the loss of members by disownment on account of marriage.

From many articles in the "London Friend," and the "British Friend," I infer, that a considerable number of persons professing with the Society, but not in membership, attend the meetings of Friends held for public worship. Most of these, I presume, are descendants of Friends, or persons who have lost their right of membership by marrying contrary to discipline.

Having no statistics by which I can judge of the number who have left the Society in this way, it is difficult to judge how far this cause has contributed to its decrease. When we consider that, from a very early period, similar rules of discipline with regard to marriage have been in force in America; and that, nevertheless, during most of the time that has since elapsed, the Society of Friends in that country has been on the increase, we must conclude that this has not been the main cause of its decline in Great Britain and Ireland.

In connexion with the subject of disuniting members for marrying contrary to the rules of the Society, I will venture to make a few remarks on the treatment of offenders.

George Fox says, "Be it known unto all, that we cast out none from among us, for if they go from the life, and spirit, and power, in which our unity is, they cast out themselves. And so it has been our way to admonish them, that they may come to the Spirit and light of God, which they have gone from, and so come into the unity again. For our fellowship stands in the light that the world hates, and in the Spirit which the world grieves, vexes, and quenches; and if they will not hear an admonition as before, the light condemns them,

and then goes the testimony of truth out against them." *

Here the ground of disownment is stated to be a departure from the life and Spirit of God in the soul, which is the only bond of Christian unity. It may be asked, How shall we prove when a member of a religious Society has departed from this life and Spirit? The test given by our Saviour is, "Ye shall know them by their fruits." And we are taught that "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance." When the life and conversation of a member becomes inconsistent with these fruits of the Spirit, we may conclude that he has broken the bond of unity, and requires the care of the Body.

George Fox, after alluding to the injunction of Christ, in relation to an offending brother, to admonish him privately before it is told to the Church, adds this caution: "And further, when the Church is told, and the party admonished by the Church, again and again, and he or they remain still insensible and unreconciled, let not final judgment go forth against him or her, until every one of the meeting have cleared his or her conscience; that if anything be upon any, further to visit such transgression, they may clear themselves, that, *if possible*, the party may be reached and saved." †

It is evident, that in the mind of that great and good man, the first object in view was to reclaim the offender. Like a humane and skilful surgeon, he would not amputate a diseased limb so long as there was a possibility of saving it. It is a question worthy of serious consideration, whether those who are not guilty of any moral delinquency, who have not violated any Christian testimony, but have merely infringed some conventional rule of the Society, can be disowned on the principles laid down by George Fox—principles that must commend themselves to every Christian heart.

* Works of G. Fox. American Edition. Vol. vii., pp. 339, 340.

† Ibid.

Is the marriage of a Friend with a person not a member of the Society to be considered, in all cases, an offence requiring condemnation? Can it be said, in all such cases, that the party has gone from the life and power of God in the soul?

I would not be understood by these remarks to hold out the least encouragement for persons of different religious persuasions to join in marriage, nor for serious and pious Christians to unite themselves with the dissolute, or with the votaries of fashion. The sweet influence of religious union is requisite to consecrate the nuptial tie. It is this only that can qualify the parties to unite in the judicious education of their offspring, and to sympathise fully with each other in all that pertains to the highest interests of the soul.

I will now recapitulate the points I have endeavoured to prove.

1st. It has been shown that, near the close of the last century, the inordinate pursuit of wealth, and the influence of a worldly spirit, had withdrawn the affections of very many Friends from the treasures of Christ's kingdom; and that members in affluent circumstances had more weight in meetings for discipline than was due to their religious attainments. This state of things produced weakness in the Body, and opened the way for innovations in doctrine and practice.

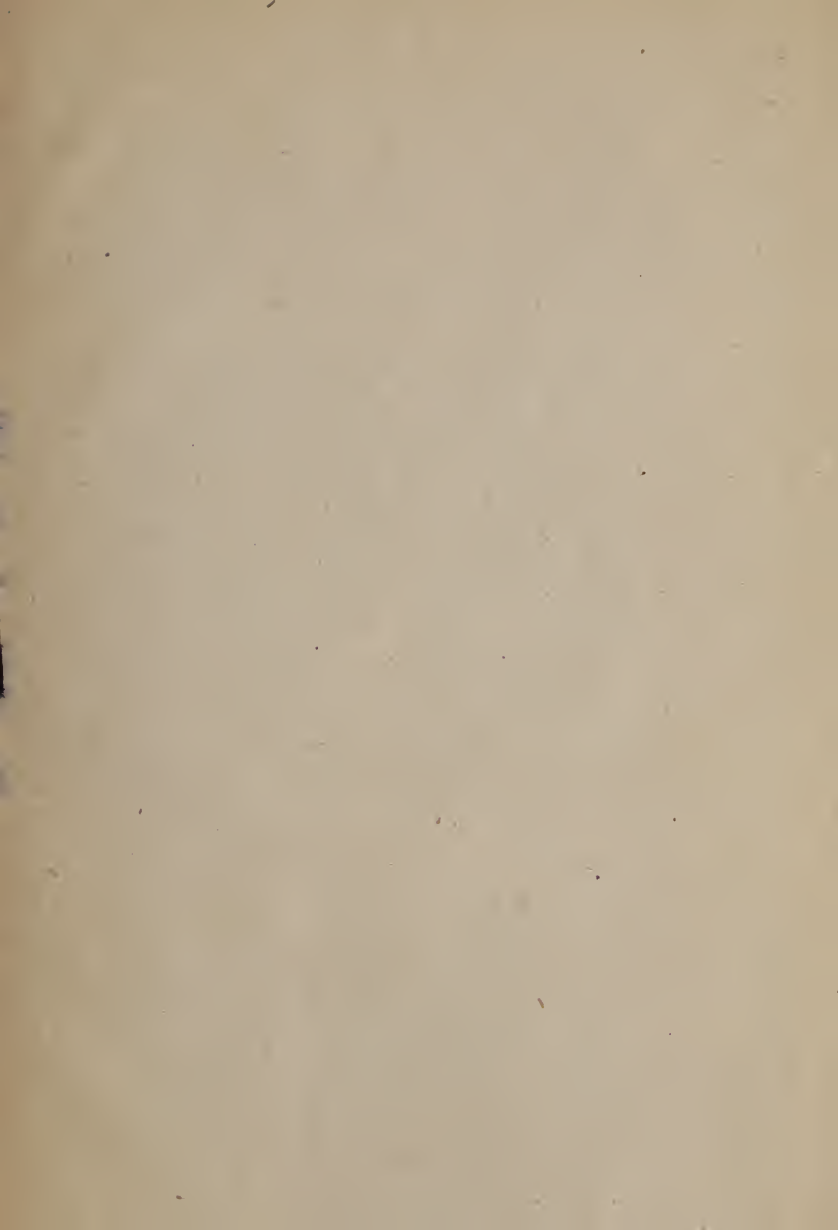
2. Under the second head, I have shown that the early Friends differed from most other professors of Christianity on some important points of doctrine; and that their successors, about the beginning of the present century, becoming alarmed by the prevalence of infidelity on the Continent, and by the schism in Ireland, inclined towards the doctrines now called Evangelical. This change became more apparent when Joseph John Gurney published his religious views. His doctrines were cordially received by the dignitaries of the Established Church, and by influential members of the Society of Friends, showing that they had assimilated in sentiment. The universal and saving light of Christ is proved to be the fundamental doctrine of Friends. It is shown that the doctrines of Joseph

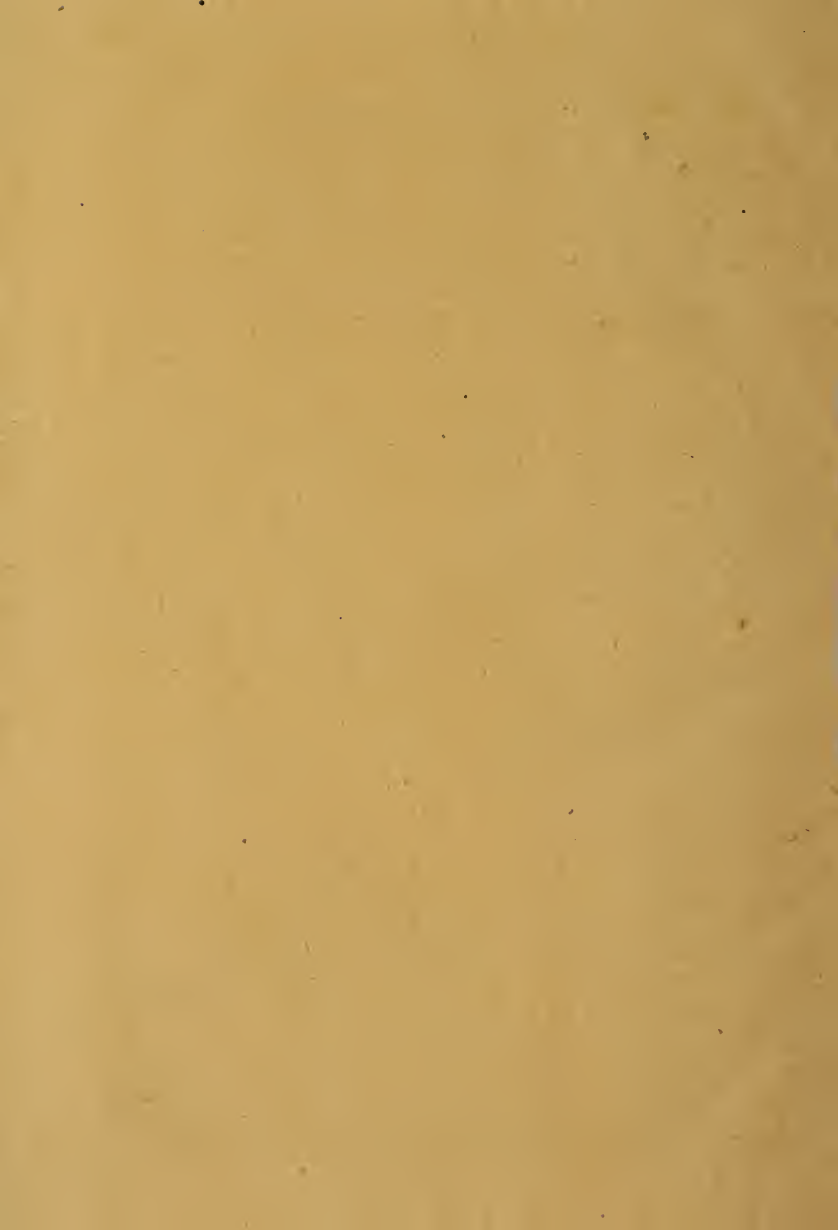
John Gurney on the Scriptures, the Trinity, Original Sin, Imputative Righteousness, the body and blood of Christ, Sanctification, and Justification, are different from those of the early Friends, and more in accordance with the Articles of the Church of England.

Friends in Great Britain are joining the Church of England, and other churches, called Evangelical, as did the followers of George Keith, and for the same reason, because their doctrines are similar. Hence I conclude, that the *chief cause* of decline has been an assimilation with the doctrines of the Established Church.

3. The loss of members by disownment on account of marriage has been considerable, but is not the chief cause of decline. I have cited the views of George Fox on dealing with offenders, and shown that it is only when they depart from the life and Spirit of God in the soul that they should be disowned. It is queried how far this is applicable to those who have not violated any Christian testimony, but have merely infringed the conventional rules of the Society.

In conclusion, I may say that these views are offered with a sincere desire to promote the best interests of the Society of Friends, by one who deplores the defections and divisions that have lessened its numbers and impaired its usefulness. While I acknowledge that all who "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity," and lead a holy life, are members of that "Church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven," I believe that the doctrines, testimonies, and discipline of the Society of Friends are more in accordance with Christian principles than any other, and that the great work to which it was called by the Head of the Church not being yet completed, its mission is not ended.





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